DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 406 517 CE 073 465

TITLE	Correctional Education Programs for Adults with Learning Disabilities.
INSTITUTION	National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center, Washington, DC.
SPONS AGENCY	National Inst. for Literacy, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	96
NOTE	18p.
CONTRACT	X257B30002
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Opinion Papers (120)
JOURNAL CIT	Linkages; v3 n2 Fall 1996
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Education; Adult Programs; *Adult Students; Annotated Bibliographies; Community Organizations; *Correctional Education; Correctional Rehabilitation; Counseling Services; Educational Benefits; *Educational Diagnosis; *Educational Needs; *Learning Disabilities; Newsletters; Nonprofit Organizations; Program Effectiveness; Student Evaluation; Student Placement; Success

ABSTRACT

This newsletter contains six articles about correctional education for learning-disabled adults. In "Correctional Education: A Worthwhile Investment; An Interview with Steven Steurer," the executive director of the Correctional Education Association (CEA) explains the benefits of correctional education and some of the CEA's efforts to improve the educational services for learning-disabled inmates. "Learning Disabilities and the Correctional System" (Neil Sturomski) emphasizes the importance of diagnosing learning disabilities and accommodating learning-disabled adults in correctional education. "Exit upon Entry" (Barbara McAnelly) describes placement options available to inmates with disabilities. "Success with Special Services in Correctional Settings" (Carrie Swanson) lists some interventions/accommodations that have proved successful for learning-disabled inmates. "The Fortune Society" (Charles W. Washington, Donna James, Jessica Scannell) profiles a nonprofit community-based organization dedicated to helping ex-offenders break the cycle of crime/incarceration, helping young people lead productive lives, and educating the public about prisons and criminal justice issues. "A (H)old Life to a New Life" (Steven J. Garr) is a discussion by an ex-inmate of his learning disability and success on the General Educational Development Tests. Concluding the newsletter is an annotated list of eight organizations concerned with learning disabilities and correctional and literacy education. (MN)

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ED 406 517

CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS FOR ADULTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

LINKAGES
Fall 1996
Vol. 3, No. 2

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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From the Director . . .

Correctional education programs are designed to help inmates acquire basic skills, social skills, workplace readiness and vocational skills, and to foster enhanced self-esteem. The ultimate goal of correctional education is to reduce recidivism -- to help inmates become self-sufficient so that they can be re-integrated into society and become productive and successful workers, citizens, and family members.

However, the incidence of learning disabilities (LD) among inmates has been **estimated** at between 30% and 50%, compared to 5% to 15% among the general adult population. These startling statistics have implications for the delivery of literacy services to inmates of correctional facilities.

Successful adult literacy programs offer a full range of educational services from assessment of LD to appropriate materials selection to individualized programs of study. This issue of *Linkages* focuses on adult literacy programs within correctional settings and on some documented successes in serving adults with LD. We hope that this newsletter is helpful to correctional education practitioners, policymakers, and researchers in designing programs that effectively meet the needs of adult students with LD and help them on the road to true self-sufficiency.

- Mary Ann Corley

LINKAGES
Linking Literacy & Learning Disabilities
Fall 1996
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Correctional Education Programs For Adults with Learning Disabilities

Correctional Education: A Worthwhile Investment

An Interview with Stephen Steurer

Executive Director of the Correctional Education Association

According to the 1993 National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS), the majority of inmates in our nation's prisons have lower literacy skills and lower educational attainments than adults in the nation as a whole.[1] Stephen Steurer, Executive Director of the Correctional Education Association (CEA), states that most inmates also are poor, unskilled, were under- or unemployed, and have a greater likelihood of being learning disabled. While direct correlation between educational disadvantage and crime has not been verified, this description of the prison's population suggests the probability that low literacy skills, poverty, and crime are related.

Correctional education programs help inmates to break the cycle of low literacy skills and criminal activity by providing them with the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in the workplace and in society. Effective correctional education programs focus on helping inmates develop problem-solving and decision-making skills that they can use within the prison industry and in employment after their release.

[1] Kirsch, I.S., Jungeblut, A., Jenkins, L., and Kolstad, A. (1993). *Adult Literacy in America: A first look at the results of the National Adult Literacy Survey*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education.

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A recent CEA review of current studies indicates that inmates who undergo correctional education average up to a 20% reduction in recidivism from that of the general prison population. These findings lend support to the importance of funding for correctional education programs. In fact, state legislators have made GED and vocational education programs mandatory in both Maryland and Hawaii state prisons.

The CEA works with legislators, administrators, and educators to heighten awareness of the need for correctional education. According to Steurer, correctional education must focus on more than basic skills instruction; it also must include vocational training and counseling for inmates to ensure their successful re-integration into society following their release. By raising awareness of these concerns, Steurer works both to ensure funding equity and to institute standards of quality for correctional education programs.

To illustrate the importance of correctional education, Mary Ann Wathen, a teacher within the Maryland Correctional Institution - Jessup, assigned her intermediate reading students to answer the question, "What has correctional education done for me?" The following excerpts from four of her students' essays touch upon issues of self-esteem, goal setting, adjusted-pace learning, and employability.

. . .Correctional Education has helped build my self-esteem. When I first started school in the prison, I couldn't read, spell, or write words. Now I can read whatever anybody puts in front of me . . . It's a wonderful feeling to read and write the words I see. - Robert

. . .Correctional Education is not a fast program, it is a program that works with me. It is also helping me stay focused in life. It's also keeping me on the right track to be a positive person. Once I go back on the outside world, it will help me to set goals in life. - Karim

. . .Many people have furthered their work habits with the education that is received inside these prison walls. For example, I know this guy named Kenny. He got his GED and college degree while incarcerated. When he got out, he got a permanent job . . . - Michael

During incarceration, inmates can be transferred to several correctional facilities, each with its own education program. Matching the needs of inmates with learning disabilities with appropriate instructional programs often presents challenges.

There are federal laws designed to protect persons with learning disabilities, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (P.L. 101-476) which covers students until the age of 21, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (P.L. 101-336), and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (P.L. 93-112). However, programs may lack adequate funding for staff, train-

Selected Standards for Adult and Juvenile Correctional Education Programs

018 Educational Incentive: There is a system of incentives, backed by departmental directives, which ensures that functionally illiterate, non-English speaking and learning handicapped offenders have access to appropriate education programs and are encouraged to enroll and remain in such programs until they have reached a level of functional competency or the maximum level they can achieve.

019 Screening, Assessment, Evaluation: There is a system for initial screening, assessment, and evaluation to determine the educational needs of each person at intake.

021 Individual Program Plan: An individual program plan is developed for each student

022 Student Evaluation: There is a program for regular evaluation of student progress to document/certify the attainment of grades, credits, competencies, certificate, and/or diploma

027 Instructional Resource Materials: Institutional education programs are supported by appropriate print and non-print instructional materials, media, and library services

029 Special Education: Special education programs are available to meet the needs of all handicapped students regardless of age.

ing, and equipment to easily accommodate inmates with learning disabilities.

To ensure that educational programs are consistent in the quality of services provided, 31 standards for adult and juvenile correctional education programs have been developed. Choosing from a list of proposed standards, some received from correctional educators, a joint Board of the CEA and the Association of State and Federal Directors of Correctional Education compiled and field-tested draft standards in several institutions across the country. Not to be confused with strict mandates, the 31 standards serve as benchmarks of program quality.

Six of these 31 standards address the issue of teaching inmates with learning disabilities and are designed to support the intent of current legislation. Among the standards are provisions for a system of incentives to entice inmates with learning disabilities into education programs; initial screening for all inmates which can determine the presence of a suspected learning disability; development of individual program plans for setting educational goals and objectives; regular evaluations of the student's progress; and the availability of non-print learning materials and special classroom accommodations (for full text, see box on page 2).

To provide supplemental training to general adult and correctional educators, CEA has hosted several national informational videoconferences. Using satellite technology, programs are transmitted to participating sites where audiences are encouraged to interact with regional leaders and engage in discussions. Two recent videoconferences focused on providing information about screening and teaching adult students with learning disabilities and on the implications of ADA and IDEA. These videoconferences, co-hosted by the National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center and viewed in more than 40 states and one site in Canada, inspired many positive comments. Most responding participants indicated that the information was "interesting," "helpful," "accurate," and "clear." Correctional and adult educators alike acknowledged the need for professional development and said that they appreciated the training. Videocassettes of these conferences along with their supporting materials are available through the CEA. *(For more information, see the RESOURCES section of this newsletter.)*

SUMMARY OF EVALUATIONS FOR THE SCREENING AND TEACHING ADULTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES VIDEOCONFERENCES

On a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high), the following averages reflect the general opinion of these videoconferences.

SCREENING	Avg.	TEACHING	Avg.
Helpful?	3.7	Helpful?	3.5
Accuracy?	4.0	Accuracy?	3.9
Clarity?	3.9	Clarity?	3.9

After re-entering society, many former inmates are left with no support system for continuing their education. Steurer envisions a coordinated system of correctional education that supports students from prison to the street and gives former inmates access to general adult and substance abuse education following their release. This system would benefit from standardization by and reinforcement from the courts. Judges could either make the education program a mandatory provision of the inmate's jail sentence or provide incentives, such as reduced jail time, to ensure the inmate's participation.

Correctional education is sometimes the best resource for inmates who wish to lead a better life but lack the educational and vocational skills to do so. Steurer's vision of a program that reaches through the prison bars and into the streets will bring hope to men and women who would otherwise end up in an ever-repeating cycle of criminal activity and jail time.

Contributors to this article include: Stephen Steurer and Alice Tracy of the CEA, and Charles W. Washington and Belinda Bates of the National ALLD Center.

Learning Disabilities and the Correctional System

By Neil Sturomski

Are thirty percent of individuals in correctional facilities learning disabled? Should forty percent be receiving special education services? Do fifty percent of juvenile delinquents have a learning disability? Will thirty percent of individuals with learning disabilities be arrested three to five years out of high school? While we do not know the exact percentages, we can say for certain that there appears to be an over-representation of individuals with learning disabilities in the correctional population.

Some studies have suggested that people with learning disabilities are more likely than others to get caught, be found guilty, and be sentenced. In addition, a number of theories suggest a link between learning disabilities and juvenile delinquency. These theories imply that individuals with learning disabilities are more susceptible to committing crimes by the very characteristics of being learning disabled. Characteristics such as impulsivity, poor social skills, short-term memory problems, and difficulty with attention may predispose individuals with learning disabilities to problems with the law. In addition, individuals who have failed in school and have low self-esteem may look for acceptance in other ways such as becoming "the best" at things that are illegal or joining a "gang" for approval and a sense of belonging.

Imagine being impulsive and having difficulty with attention, trying on new shoes from a store rack, accidentally walking out of the store with them on, and getting stopped for shoplifting. Imagine having difficulty with spatial skills, going through an intersection without automatically identifying a road sign and hitting another car. Imagine being told by "the gang" to turn right to avoid a confrontation with police and you turn left because of difficulty with directionality. Imagine getting a subpoena, having difficulty with reading and time management, not showing up for a court date and facing additional charges. Imagine finding yourself in trouble with the law and when asked to tell your story you do so in different ways to different people because of poor memory skills, but it's perceived as lying. Imagine being in court and having a lawyer ask you a question that doesn't make any sense to you and you incorrectly answer "yes" when pressured. Imagine being incarcerated and having the prison guard give you a four-step set of directions that you must do in order, and having difficulty with memory and sequencing.

Learning disabilities affect every facet of life. The characteristics associated with learning disabilities affect school, work, and daily life activities. And those individuals with learning disabilities who come in contact with the justice system will most likely find it difficult to understand and traverse the system. They are more likely to get entangled in the justice system and stay longer because of their perception of rights, questions, and legalese. For example, they may not even understand what their Miranda rights mean.

A learning disability can affect an individual's cognitive ability, decision-making process, learning style, self-esteem and self confidence, interpretation of social situations, and overall perception of the world. In many respects, a learning disability is no less disabling than a physical disability. But a person in a wheel chair may be more likely to get our empathy and support, while a person with a learning disability -- an invisible disability -- may be called "slow" or "stupid" and be told to try harder.

A large number of individuals with limited literacy skills were not identified in their early years as learning disabled and, as such, they ended up thinking of themselves as unable to

learn. Years of accumulated frustration and failure led, in many of these cases, to students dropping out of school. These formative years were ones during which the individuals may have developed withdrawn or aggressive behavior, and some of these students may end up in correctional facilities.

If we truly want our correctional system to make a difference, I believe that, at a minimum, the correctional intake process should incorporate learning disabilities screening procedures early on. This information would provide attorneys, judges, probation officers, educators, and other criminal justice professionals with valuable information.

Most important, educators who work in correctional education must recognize that individuals with learning disabilities are persons who learn through different means than the general population. As a result, correctional educators must be provided with adequate training to:

Characteristics such as impulsivity, poor social skills, short-term memory problems, and difficulty with attention may predispose individuals with learning disabilities to problems

- understand learning disabilities and their characteristics,
- apply screening and learning style inventories to improve practice,
- understand the differences between screening and formal assessment,
- use effective instructional practices including specific techniques and instructional strategies,
- use strategies training so that students can learn how to learn, think, and solve problems on their own,
- understand and use high and low technologies whenever possible, and
- recognize the self-esteem and social skills issues of these adults and provide ways to foster development in these areas.

In addition, correctional educators must understand how to accommodate learners by teaching their students how to work around things they cannot do and to maximize their strengths. Finally, correctional educators must recognize the importance of effectively collaborating with professionals in adult education, literacy, and learning disabilities to continue to strengthen their ability to help adults with suspected or diagnosed learning disabilities.

Educating attorneys, judges, probation officers, district attorneys, and other prison personnel about learning disabilities is key in effectively representing and serving individuals with learning disabilities who enter the criminal justice system. For in the end, fewer offenders who successfully participate in prison literacy programs recidivate, thus slowing the rise in prison populations and costs. But in order to be rehabilitative, correctional education must be responsive to the particular learning needs of offenders. Appropriate interviewing can provide valuable information on learning styles, learning needs, learning strengths, self-esteem, and other difficulties that impede learning. In order to offer a more specific instructional program, correctional educators must meet the needs of learners and capitalize on their strengths. To be effective it is necessary to create a safe learning environment where the student is able to deal with his or her insecurities and take the necessary risks without fear of humiliation or ridicule. While many correctional educators and other correctional professionals do not know about learning disabilities and are unprepared to deal with them, I believe addressing this problem is one way of slowing the rising tide of crime in the United States.❖

Neil Sturomski is the former director of the National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center. He now heads Sturomski & Associates, a consulting firm designed to help adult educators, literacy practitioners, employers, and job training program instructors better meet the needs of adults with learning disabilities.

Exit Upon Entry

By Barbara McAnelly

Educational training programs are often challenged to assist individuals with disabilities in acquiring basic life and workplace skills. Add to that the challenge of a classroom located behind an electrified, secured fence, and armed guards patrolling from towers and gates, and the obstacles to overcome have been significantly increased. Teaching adults with learning disabilities in a correctional setting is often quite challenging, but with early identification and appropriate programming, it can also be rewarding.

Disabled inmates who have not reached the age of 22 and are receiving educational services qualify for special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), P.L. 101-476, which guarantees a free appropriate education. Inmates with learning disabilities at the Florida Department of Corrections are identified using a concept called "Exit Upon Entry." The inmates are screened for learning disabilities; interviewed to determine their goals during incarceration; and tested academically, vocationally, and medically. In addition, their previous special education records are requested for review. Based upon their security and medical profiles, academic levels, vocational interests/aptitudes, and goals, inmates with disabilities are assigned to a designated permanent institution with special education and academic and vocational programming.

At the permanent institution, the special education teacher interviews the inmate with disabilities to refine their goals, previously developed at the reception center, and to review the services available at that institution to meet their needs. Following the interview, the special education teacher arranges a meeting with other pertinent correctional staff to discuss what the inmate wishes to accomplish while he or she is incarcerated. These staff members may include a general education teacher, the Classification Officer responsible for the inmate's overall programming, the Health Services Administrator responsible for the inmate's medical and mental health, and the Transition Assistance Officer responsible for the inmate's return to the community. They also will review all of the necessary information to determine the most appropriate placement of the inmate within the correctional setting. Based on the information discussed, the team, together with the inmate, develops a Transition Plan for his or her educational, work, behavioral, and transitional needs. (A Transition Plan is the equivalent of a public school Individual Education Plan.)

Placement options available to the inmate with disabilities include:

- **General Education Class** - Literacy, Adult Basic Education, General Educational Development (GED)--leading to the equivalent of a high school diploma.
- **Vocational Education Class** - Various building trades, automotive trades, business trades, cosmetology, horticulture, computer technology trades, etc.-- leading to a vocational certificate in the acquired trade.
- **On-the-Job Training Class** - Any available job within the correctional setting ranging from chef, houseman/janitor, clerk, electrician's helper, or automotive mechanic leading to pre-employment skills.
- **Prison Industry Job Class** - Industry jobs for government suppliers such as: garment factories, automotive restoratives, furniture building/refinishers, and metal manufactories --leading to a certificate of basic employment skills.

Special education services range from a consultative approach to self-contained classes to

single-cell instruction and include all related services from psychological counseling to occupational, physical, and speech therapy.

In an effort to teach the inmate through the most successful avenue, general and special education teachers assess perceptual strengths and weaknesses, learning rates, styles, and profiles using checklists and standardized assessments in the classroom setting. Often the strongest source of successful instruction is a combination of computer-assisted instruction with small group and one-on-one instruction for review of tasks that present difficulty. Many inmates do not wish other inmates (e.g., age-related peers and hard-core offenders) to know that they are unable to read or to do math. The computer provides a sense of security and anonymity until certain tasks can be accomplished.

After obtaining a sense of security and the self-esteem that accompanies being able to complete tasks that were difficult and unattainable, peer tutoring, with community volunteers or trained inmate tutors, helps the inmate receive the much-needed one-on-one instruction for advancing academic, vocational, and social skills. Constant review and modification of strategies by the teachers and the inmate help to eradicate potential road blocks and steer the inmate onto a path of continuous learning. In preparation for release, inmates with disabilities are either reviewed for eligibility in either vocational rehabilitation training or referred to "one stop centers" within their home communities. These measures allow inmates with disabilities to continue their education, or obtain necessary transitional services and/or support to ensure a smooth transition to becoming successful law-abiding citizens.

Within the correctional setting, inmates with disabilities are positioned for success through involvement, and they "buy-in" to their education and training from the time they enter the correctional setting until the time they complete their sentence and return to our communities. By focusing inmates' attention on "exiting" the system when they "enter," you begin teaching goal setting and decision-making skills, which many inmates with disabilities lack. Also the inmates' thoughts are refocused away from not seeing family and not being connected to daily life beyond the prison's gate. This "Exit Upon Entry" approach bridges the gap that inmates have developed in their education via instruction and assistance and reconnects them with the support services that are necessary for their continued success upon reentering their communities. The more inmates with disabilities are able to experience success and educational achievement, and the more support and assistance we provide upon their release for continued education and employment, the less we will see of the same inmates with disabilities returning to the correctional setting. ❖

. . . Inmates with disabilities are positioned for success through involvement, and they "buy-in" to their education and training from the time they enter the correctional setting . . .

Barbara McAnelly is the Special Education Coordinator for the state of Florida Department of Corrections. She is responsible for the direction of 22 designated special education prisons. She has a BS from Greensboro College and an MA in Education and Human Development from the George Washington University.

Success with Special Services in Correctional Settings

By Carrie Swanson

Educational services within the corrections setting can provide inmates with opportunities to advance their academic skills, recognize their abilities, and attain personal goals. Incarcerated students, especially those who have special learning needs, may have had few success stories associated with the education process. However, this can change if there is a program in place for identifying, documenting, and accommodating inmates with learning disabilities.

Some programs identify students with suspected learning disabilities and refer them to special needs services. Identification of students with disabilities can come in a variety of forms. Frequently, correctional educators make accurate referrals based on observations and interviews with students. This process is enhanced when there has been formal staff training in the area of learning disabilities and when a screening tool is used. Other correctional staff members may notice manifestations of learning disabilities and make referrals as well. It is critical that referrals are acted upon, effective changes are implemented, and follow-up is provided.

Some students may be aware of their learning disabilities and seek special services for themselves. All inmates under the age of twenty-two must be offered the opportunity to disclose the presence of a disability. This should be presented in a manner which compensates for barriers with language, reading skills, and written communication. The institution's orientation process, institution newsletters, signs in housing units, and personal interviews can assist with the process of identifying those inmates who fall under the Child Find process of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) (P.L. 101-476). The number of students who self-refer should increase proportionally to the success of the special services program.

After students are referred to special services programs, the learning disability must be officially documented. The process of acquiring existing documentation from public schools, medical and mental health facilities, correctional institutions, and other state agencies can be cumbersome. As the amount of time since the student's last school enrollment increases, this task becomes more difficult. For a majority of incarcerated adults, these records are not available, or they are outdated and need to be supplemented with current assessments. Acquisition of these records does not always qualify as appropriate documentation but ultimately can assist with future assessments and accommodations.

The documentation process is an essential component of a credible special services program, and it demands competent staff members at the helm. Institutions with a certified diagnostician on staff have an advantage which becomes critical to the success of the special services program. A professional evaluation team, which must include a specialist in the area of the student's learning disability, is needed for determining the eligibility of students for special education services. The entire special services program can come to a halt if there is no one on staff to review existing records, provide assessments, and determine interventions and accommodations which match the student's special needs.

Once the identification and documentation procedures are completed, measurable strides can be made by implementing interventions and accommodations for the student. It is important to consider security issues and to go through the appropriate channels before implementing accommodations. Listed below are some interventions and accommodations which have been

successful for inmates with learning disabilities:

- Large print tests and texts
- Highlighting pens
- Electronic dictionaries
- "Talking" calculators
- Foam ear plugs
- Raised line paper
- Enrollment in Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic
- Note takers
- Adjustments with admissions procedures
- Tape recorders
- Magnifying sheets
- Colored overlays or filters
- One-to-one tutoring
- Adjustments in classroom attendance
- Dictionaries designed for poor spellers
- Oral testing
- Transition services
- Classroom inclusion (with support services)
- Learning lab situations (small group)
- Books on tape
- Curriculum adjustments/extensions
- Word processing programs

This list is not comprehensive, but it is representative of the types of interventions and accommodations which may be possible for students with learning disabilities in correctional settings. For the incarcerated adult, the idea that he can improve his abilities with the use of accommodations is a novel one. His past may be littered with implications that his lack of success is attributed to his lack of effort or to his lack of potential.

It is important that students fully understand their abilities and disabilities. Time needs to be designated to assist students with learning disabilities in learning appropriate methods of requesting and implementing accommodations. This ability to advocate for oneself will become a skill which allows the individual to reach a level of independence more commensurate with abilities. Special services programs should also assist students in recognizing how their learning disabilities will impact all aspects of their lives. Programs should focus on handling learning disabilities at home, at work, and in academic environments.

Awareness is the most important factor related to the successful implementation of a special services program in the correctional setting. Security staff, education staff, management and students should be aware of issues related to special services. Staff should be aware of the legal issues related to individuals with learning disabilities. Teachers need to have an awareness of the diversities found among learning disabled students, and they should be provided with a variety of instructional strategies and classroom support services. Management can benefit from a professional's interpretation of appropriate accommodations, accepted procedures, and program development. Awareness at the management level can become a guide for the institution's responsibility regarding legal issues and obligations. As previously mentioned, students also need extensive support as they gain an awareness of their learning disabilities. The special services program needs to make an extensive effort to incorporate a level of awareness which infiltrates the entire system. Without this awareness throughout all levels, roadblocks will continually appear and may eventually undermine the established credibility such a program needs.❖

Carrie Swanson has held the position of Diagnostician/ Special Service Provider for five years at the Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution in conjunction with the Blue Mountain Community College. She has a Master's Degree in Teacher Education.

The Fortune Society

by Charles W. Washington
with Donna James
and Jessica Scannell

In 1967, the off-Broadway play "Fortune and Men's Eyes" raised public concern about the impact that prison life was having upon inmates and ex-offenders. The play, written by ex-offender John Herbert, shocked and intrigued audiences as they witnessed actors portray some of the harsh realities of life in the "joint." Inspired by a desire to create an organization that would help ex-offenders help themselves, a small group of people, headed by David Rothenberg, who produced "Fortune and Men's Eyes," formed The Fortune Society.

The Fortune Society is a nonprofit community-based organization dedicated to:

- helping ex-offenders break out of the destructive cycle of crime and incarceration;
- helping young people develop the resources they need to lead productive lives before they commit a serious crime; and
- educating the public about prisons, criminal justice issues, and the root cause of crime.

Fortune offers ex-offenders counseling, career development, treatment for substance abuse, AIDS/HIV assistance, information, and referrals. Fortune also offers an extensive education program that includes assessments, GED preparation, and one-to-one tutoring in reading, math, social studies, and English as a second language.

Upon entering Fortune's education program, students go through an orientation period that gives special education teachers an opportunity to observe and assess their behavior and needs. If a learning disability is suspected, teachers work to accommodate the student's style and strengths. In some cases, the student is referred to an outside agency for formal diagnosis.

At the end of each term, students in the Fortune Society's Math Education Program take a test to determine their grade equivalent in math. The following week, students are asked to complete a math self-assessment to reflect on themselves as math students for the past term. They share experiences, feelings, thoughts, and goals that come to mind when they read a series of "starters" such as *"What surprised me . . . ,"* or *"What challenged me . . ."* The following are excerpts from Robert Cotton's Term-End Math Self-Assessment completed on June 18, 1996. Because Mr. Cotton is a beginning reader, Nishël Taufeeq, the Math Program Coordinator read the "starters" to him and recorded his dictated responses. The "starters" are italicized. Phrases in parentheses are included as clarifications by Ms. Taufeeq.

After reflecting and writing about the math I did this term, I feel . . . Great, because more or less, now I got my mind a little more open to math. Math was easy to me when I was selling drugs because you had to keep the money straight, but that was easy math. This math — you have to use your mind. When I took this test when I was thirteen years old, I was putting anything then. It was like (the teacher said) "Mr. Cotton, just do the best you could do." Then I wasn't even looking at the book, so I just marked anything (and then I yelled) "finish!" Everybody else was still doing theirs. (The teacher said to me,) "Just sit there, Mr. Cotton. Don't disturb the others." I didn't even look at the book because I didn't know anything in it. They would say, "Don't worry about it; we're not going to grade you anyway." So I would just put anything down.

This time I think I got every last one of them right. Even the hard ones. I took a lot of math tests in my life, but this is the first time I've been getting a lot right. Since I've been here; the more I do it, sometimes I do feel like saying "Forget this!" with the new math you be giving us, but then I say, "Wow!" I'm comprehend-

ing things I never could comprehend before.

Please share any further comments that you have about the math program overall. It was very good. Excellent. Charming to know everybody. Everybody helped me. You all helped me a lot. I wouldn't have gotten to know everything I did without you all pushing me and giving me a lot of confidence in myself and saying I can do it. It's good to know that everybody opened their arms to me and that you didn't kick me out. It was a good feeling to get an award from you (for achievement in math December, 1995). I never got an award in school before except for getting kicked out of the most schools, but they don't give out awards for that. My family didn't believe in me but people here did. I think I am a very intelligent person. I may not get a 12.9 on the math or reading test but I just want to know enough so everybody won't cheat me. I learned a lot in this last two years. If anything ever happens to me at least I know I accomplished something in my life that I never did before. I could write a book.

"I learned a lot in this last two years. If anything ever happens to me at least I know I accomplished something in my life that I never did before." - Robert Cotton

Note: In January 1995, Robert's math score on the Test for Adult Basic Education Math Computation section was 3.1 (third grade level); in June 1996, he achieved a 4.8

Other students are asked to keep journals about their past experiences. The following excerpt is from a Fortune Society student's journal.

A June Day Essay

By Allen J

On June 2, 1995, I spoke in front of a student body of about 300 people. I spoke about how hard it was to hide the fact that I did not know how to read and spell; hide it from friends and family. I told them that it was harder hiding it from them than it was learning how to read and write. I also told them that I was forty-five years old and working on my GED with hopes of going to college.

I also mentioned the fact that I used drugs to hide my problem, and at the age of forty-three I got busted. I was mandated to go to the Fortune Society for counseling on drug use. That is where I enrolled in the education program.

Yes, it is hard, but I'm sticking to it because I know how important it is to have an education and go on in life. I don't do drugs any more and I don't want to. The Fortune family stays on me and keeps encouraging me. My tutor, Ruth, is the best of all. She is also hard as a rock and don't take no stuff. She stays with me no matter what.❖

The Fortune Society's Donna James, Volunteer Coordinator, and Jessica Scannell, Beginning Reading Coordinator assisted with the compilation of this article.

The National ALLD Center Homepage

The National ALLD Center now has a homepage on the National Institute for Literacy's LINCS WWW site at:

http://novel.nifl.gov

What you'll find:

- Information on the National ALLD Center
- National ALLD Center Publications
- Postings from the NIFL-ALLD Listserv
- Links to Other LD Resources

A (H)old Life to a New Life*

By Steven J. Garr

As a young boy I was put into special education classes because I was diagnosed as being mentally retarded. I was not able to learn as quickly as the other children. The teachers did not have the patience to spend time with me.

I remember when I was in grade school, I would be picked on and get into trouble for one thing or another. I was big for my age and it seemed that no matter what happened, I was the one to get the blame. I was kept in these classes until I dropped-out in the tenth grade. I still had no basic education.

After dropping-out of high school, at the age of seventeen, I got a job at a city park, which lasted for only a short time. That was one of four jobs that I would hold in the next three to four years. I wanted friends, so I stole money and alcohol for them. But when it was gone, so were they. I didn't know it then that my frustration of not being like other children was from a learning disability. I went through the juvenile system many times.

My family and I had a lot of problems. I fought with my brother, sister, the kids at school and in the neighborhood. Because of my illiteracy and frustration, other children would call me retarded and I would try to hurt them. My mother was afraid that I would hurt my brother or someone else so she had me arrested many times.

My father worked two or three hundred miles from our house so he was not there most of the time. When he was there, such as during the weekend, he would treat me as the 'special' child that was not able to do anything for himself. After a long time of this, I started thinking I *was* retarded.

Still trying at age 22 to 'fit in' somewhere, I participated in a burglary. I was told by the people I was with to shoot the witness, so I did. I was convicted a few years later for the crime of murder, first degree. I finally found out that I could read and write a little from a guy in the jail who helped me write a letter to my mother. That was the first time that anyone really took the time to show me that I was not stupid and that I could learn.

When I arrived at the Washington State Reformatory to begin serving a life sentence, I enrolled in the Edmonds Community College, the education program in the institution. At the time I had no skills to help me make a living or to be a productive member of society, and I had no self-esteem. I have been working hard on obtaining these skills for the last eleven years.

In these last eleven years, I have gone from knowing next to nothing about history, science, mathematics, basic literacy . . . to feeling that I know a little. But the biggest challenge for me has been to master the understanding of basic reading and writing. For the first four years that I was trying real hard to learn to read, my eyes would get very tired after about ten minutes because of a wandering left eye. I would start to see sentences from the next page appearing on the one I was reading. I found out that my left eye was a big part of my problem, and in 1987, with the help of my teacher, I was able to receive eye surgery. After the operation, I started learning a little better, but I was still having a lot of problems understanding things.

My teacher got me tested for a learning disability. This test showed that I needed bold print, extra time, and audio help if I was going to pass my GED. By learning 'how to learn,' I have passed all but one of my GED [Tests] since then. I have learned a vocational trade and I now realize I am not 'stupid.' I only wish I had believed it before I took another person's life and became incarcerated for 14 years, so far.

I want the readers not to see me as a character from a prison movie. I am much more than that now because I feel I have value and I am a literate, educated human being. Whether I return to society is not important. I go to school; I work; I have a family; I help other people. These are things I would never have known or had the chance to do if I had not been allowed the learning disability tests, the eye operation, and help from teachers and tutors who know about learning disabilities.

More money needs to be put into this kind of help for people in prison. There are thousands of good men and women in prison who did very bad things but who can become productive worthwhile citizens if only given the correct help. It is never too late.❖

**The title of this article, written by Steve, shows his particular learning disability. In its own way, it also describes his situation.*

Steven J. Garr is a scholarship GED student, a working welder, and convicted felon serving a life sentence in the Washington State Reformatory. He has donated much of his free time over the last ten years as a toy-maker for children and as a role model for other disabled inmates for the Read to Succeed Inmate Literacy Program under the direction of his instructor, Patricia Franklin.

The National ALLD Center thanks the following individuals for reviewing and contributing to this newsletter: Susan Green, Project Officer/Liaison, National Institute for Literacy; Carolyn Buser, Field Coordinator, Correctional Education Program, Maryland State Department of Education; Ivan Charner, Vice President and Director, National Institute for Work and Learning, Academy for Educational Development; Neil Sturomski, President, Sturomski & Associates; Stephen Steurer, Executive Director, Correctional Education Association; and Alice Tracy, Assistant Director, Correctional Education Association.

LINKAGES is published semiannually. Individual copies are available free of charge from the National ALLD Center by calling (800)953-2553.

This material is based upon work supported by the National Institute for Literacy under Grant No. X257B30002. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Institute for Literacy. This information is in the public domain unless otherwise indicated. Readers are encouraged to copy and share the newsletter, but are asked to credit the National ALLD Center. Comments and suggestions for **LINKAGES** are welcomed. Ideas and feedback may be shared with center staff through letters to the Editor.

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Resources

Correctional Education Association
4380 Forbes Boulevard
Lanham, MD 20706
301-918-1915

The Correctional Education Association (CEA) is a non-profit, professional association serving educators and administrators who provide services to students in correctional settings. CEA publishes the ***Journal of Correctional Education***, and ***CEA News and Notes***. CEA provides information on programming, services, and resources for juvenile and adult offenders. It also assists in the networking of correctional educators. In the Spring of 1996, CEA produced two teleconferences on "Teaching the Learning Disabled in Correctional and Adult Settings," and "Screening for Learning Disabilities in Correctional and Adult Education Settings." To obtain videocassettes of these teleconferences, contact CEA.

General Educational Development (GED) Testing Service
American Council on Education, Suite 250
One Dupont Circle, N.W.
Washington, DC 20036-1163
202/939-9490 / 800/626-9433

The GED Testing Program provides a chance for adults who did not complete a formal education to obtain a high school equivalency diploma. Callers to the GED hotline can receive information about how to prepare for and take the GED Tests, as well as a GED information brochure which lists accommodations available for adults with specific learning disabilities. The GED Tests are available in large print, audiocassette, and braille formats.

Laubach Literacy Action (LLA)
1320 Jamesville Avenue, Box 131
Syracuse, NY 13210-0131
315/ 422-9121

LLA specializes in providing services and materials enabling volunteers to work with adults in attaining the levels of reading, writing, and mathematical skills needed to solve the problems encountered in daily life. These services are provided by a national network of consultants or by LLA staff.

Learning Disabilities Association of America
4156 Library Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15234
412/341-1515

The Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA) is a membership organization for professionals, adults with learning disabilities (LD), and parents of children with learning disabilities. One of LDA's primary functions is the advocacy of educational and rehabilitative legislation affecting persons with LD. Information on publications and membership is available upon request. LDA's January/February 1996 *Newsbriefs* has a special section titled "Learning Disabilities and Juvenile Justice."

Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA)
5795 Widewaters Parkway
Syracuse, NY 13214
315/445-8000

LVA programs provide individualized, student-centered instruction in basic literacy and English as a second language for adults and teens. The national office establishes policies and develops training programs and materials. The state organizations coordinate and service local affiliates and establish new programs within their geographic areas. The local or affiliate group recruits, trains, and matches volunteer tutors with adults in need of literacy skills.

National Center for Learning Disabilities
381 Park Avenue South
Suite 1420
New York, NY 11565
212/545-7510

The National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD) is a national not-for-profit organization committed to improving the lives of those affected by learning disabilities. NCLD's Information and Referral Service links parents, professionals, and others concerned with learning disabilities with the services they need through a computerized database and trained volunteers and staff. NCLD offers membership to the public, which entitles individuals and organizations to receive a special packet of information on learning disabilities, regular updates on learning disabilities, and a copy of the magazine, *Their World*.

National Institute for Literacy's FORUM/ LISTSERV
NIFL-LD@LITERACY.NIFL.GOV
The National Institute for Literacy's FORUM/ LISTSERV provides an exchange network for the sharing of information, research, expertise, and resources regarding adult literacy and learning disabilities, family literacy (nifl-family), workplace literacy (nifl-workplace), homeless literacy (nifl-homeless), health literacy (nifl-health), and English as second language (nifl-esl). To join the learning disabilities listserv, send a message to :

listproc@literacy.nifl.gov

with a one line message:

subscribe nifl-ld firstname lastname

To join NIFL's other listservs, replace "ld" with "family," "workplace," "homeless," "health," or "esl," accordingly.

Orton Dyslexia Society
Chester Building, Suite 382
8600 LaSalle Road
Baltimore, MD 21286-2044
410/296-0232; 800/222-3123

The Orton Dyslexia Society is an international membership organization which serves as a clearinghouse of information for professionals, dyslexics, and parents of dyslexics. The Society promotes effective teaching approaches and related clinical educational intervention strategies for dyslexics and disseminates information related to dyslexia.

The Academy for Educational Development

The Academy for Educational Development, founded in 1961, is an independent, nonprofit service organization committed to addressing human development needs in the United States and throughout the world. Under contracts and grants, the Academy operates programs in collaboration with policy leaders; nongovernmental and community-based organizations; governmental agencies; international multilateral and bilateral funders; and schools, colleges, and universities. In partnership with its clients, the Academy seeks to meet today's social, economic, and environmental challenges through education and human resource development; to apply state-of-the art education, training, research, technology, management, behavioral analysis, and social marketing techniques to solve problems; and to improve knowledge and skills throughout the world as the most effective means for stimulating growth, reducing poverty, and promoting democratic and humanitarian ideals.

The National ALLD Center

The National ALLD Center, funded by the National Institute for Literacy, promotes awareness about the relationship between adult literacy and learning disabilities. Through its national information exchange network and technical assistance training, the National ALLD Center helps literacy practitioners, policymakers, and researchers better meet the needs of adults with learning disabilities. We encourage your inquiries and will either directly provide you with information or refer you to an appropriate resource.

The National Institute for Literacy

The National Institute for Literacy is an independent federal agency jointly administered by the U.S. Departments of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services. The Institute's primary goals are to provide leadership and coordination for literacy activities across federal agencies and among states, enhance the knowledge base for literacy, and create a national communications system that links the literacy field nationwide.

Staff

Mary Ann Corley, *Director*
Eve Robins, *Senior Program Officer*
Adrienne Riviere, *Information Specialist*
Belinda Bates, *Program Associate*

LINKAGES
Editor, Belinda Bates

Academy for Educational Development
National ALLD Center
1875 Connecticut Ave., NW 9th Floor
Washington, D.C. 20009-1202
Phone: 202/884-8185 or 800/953-2553
Fax: 202/884-8422
Internet: info@nalldc.aed.org

AED
Academy for Educational Development

National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center
1875 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., 9th Floor
Washington, D.C. 20009-1202

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